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Four contributors to Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners discuss their experiences with imprisonment, the changing nature of mass incarceration, the importance of solidarity both inside and outside the system, and the ongoing imprisonment of movement elders.

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RATTLING THE CAGES

ORAL HISTORIES OF NORTH AMERICAN POLITICAL PRISONERS

"Political Prisoners, Mass Incarceration, & Abolition"

ERIC KING | HERMAN BELL | DAVID GILBERT | SUSAN ROSENBERG

Originally hosted as a live conversation by Firestorm Books, recording available on Firestorm's youtube channel:
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=AuFiQf3ZWi4
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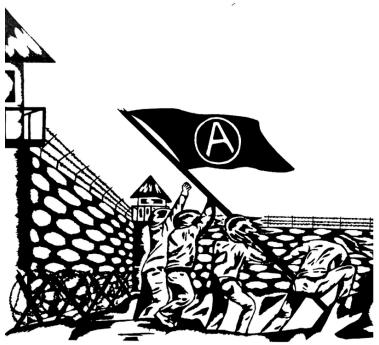
Published by AK Press, *Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners* is a project of abolitionists Josh Davidson and Eric King. The book is filled with the experience and wisdom of over thirty current and former North American political prisoners. It provides first-hand details of prison life and the political commitments that continue to lead prisoners into direct confrontation with state authorities and institutions.

Transcription, editing, and formatting by ev, Danielle, Josh, & Jeremy with help from Firestorm Books.

all labor volunteered

with whatever weapons at hand



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Join your nearest Anarchist Black Cross group (*abcf.net*).

Visit *rattlingthecages.com* to learn more.

Rattling the Cages

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all conversations are available @FirestormCoop on youtube

Eric King is a father, poet, author, and activist. In December 2023 he was released from the supermax ADX prison after spending nearly ten years as a political prisoner for an act of protest over the police murder of Michael Brown in Ferguson, Missouri. He was held in solitary confinement for years and was met with violence by guards throughout his incarceration. Eric has published three zines: *Battle Tested* (2015), *Antifa in Prison* (2019), and *Pacing in My Cell* (2019). His sentencing statement is included in the book *Defiance: Anarchist Statements Before Judge and Jury* (2019). Eric now works as a paralegal for the Bread and Roses Legal Center.

Herman Bell is a former member of both the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, and he was imprisoned for forty-five years. Herman was captured in New Orleans in 1973, and eventually he, Jalil Muntaqim, and Albert Nuh Washington were convicted of attacks on police. Herman was also implicated in the San Francisco 8 case and pleaded guilty to a lesser offense. He spent five years imprisoned in the federal system, in the Marion control unit for two of those years, before spending decades in various New York State maximum security prisons. While imprisoned he was committed to community work, and he is a founding member of the Victory Gardens Project and the Certain Days Collective. He was released in 2018, after his eighth parole hearing.

David Gilbert is a lifelong anti-imperialist who was captured and imprisoned as a result of an attempted expropriation of a Brinks truck in Nyack, New York, in 1981. He was sentenced to seventy-five years to life but his sentence was commuted by outgoing Governor Cuomo, and he was released from prison after nearly forty years in November 2021. Though he spent short stints at MCC-NY and other federal prisons and jails, David spent the majority of his forty-year incarceration at the six maximum security men's prisons in New York (Attica, Auburn, Clinton, Comstock, Wende, and Shawangunk prisons). While in prison, David was a cofounder of the Certain Days Collective, and he also helped pioneer AIDS awareness programs that saved thousands of lives in prisons across the country. David wrote numerous zines, including *Our Commitment Is to Our Communities: Mass Incarceration, Political Prisoners* and *Building a Movement for Community-Based Justice* (2014). He also wrote three books —*No Surrender: Writings from an Anti-Imperialist Political Prisoner* (2004); *Love and Struggle: My Life in SDS, the Weather Underground, and Beyond* (2012); and *Looking at the U.S. White Working Class Historically* (2017).

Susan Rosenberg spent sixteen years in high security federal prisons for her involvement in the anti-imperialist armed actions that culminated in the Resistance Conspiracy Case of the mid-1980s. Her sentence was commuted by outgoing president Bill Clinton in 2001. Susan was imprisoned at the Lexington high security unit at FCI Lexington, the first maximum security prison for women in Marianna, Florida, and FCI Danbury, and she also spent time in the DC jail. She was involved in the May 19th Communist Organization, the Puerto Rican independence movement, the movement to Ban the Box, and the successful fight for the release of longtime political prisoner Dr. Mutulu Shakur. Susan published the book *An American Radical: Political Prisoner in My Own Country* (2011).

Write to Political Prisoners mentioned in this conversation

for a monthly updated list of political prisoners & their addresses visit

nycabc.wordpress.com

Laura Whitehorn — an anti-imperialist revolutionary and artist, who was imprisoned for 14 years in federal prison for the 1983 United States Senate bombing as part of the Resistance Conspiracy Case. After working as an organizer for Students for a Democratic Society (SDS), Laura became a member of the Weather Underground organization in 1969. Laura, along with approximately 55 other people, was arrested during "The Days of Rage," several days of street fighting between protesters and police, after the WUO blew up an 1889 commemorative nine-foot bronze statue of a Chicago policeman located in Haymarket Square in Chicago. By the early 1980s, Whitehorn was active in a variety of radical organizations, in addition to the May 19 Communist Organization, including the John Brown Anti-Klan Committee and the Madame Binh Graphics Collective. During this time, Whitehorn worked with radical movements in Rhodesia, South Africa and Palestine. During the 14 years Whitehorn served in prison, she directed AIDS education and wrote numerous publications. In 2013, Whitehorn along with Kathy Boudin and Mujahid Farid founded the Release Aging People in Prison campaign.

Libertie Valance: My name is Libertie, and I'm a member of the Firestorm Collective. Tonight we're really excited to host contributors to this book right here, *Rattling the Cages: Oral Histories of North American Political Prisoners*, and they're going to be joining us for a conversation on their experiences behind bars and how today's activists can prepare themselves for political repression and the possibility of incarceration.

If you've never been to one of our events before, I'll give you our standard spiel. Firestorm is an almost 16-year-old radical bookstore owned and operated by a queer feminist collective in southern Appalachia on the land of the Cherokee people. We strive to feature books and events that reflect our interests and also the needs of marginalized communities in the South, and we're continuing to do a few events virtually alongside content that we do face-to-face. The virtual content, I think, is great for events like this where we can bring together people across borders and from a significant distance, and it's also good for folks in our community who have barriers to access related to health or Covid. So, I'm really appreciative of the ability to have these spaces.

I'm so appreciative of y'all for being here, and I'll go ahead, since you're on screen, and mention that we also have with us K'Sisay Sadiki, who is an activist, filmmaker, performing artist, and daughter of Black Panthers Pamela Hanna and longtime political prisoner Kamau Sadiki. Thank you so much for being here as well. I'm going to go ahead and pass this off to Eric to get us started here. Thank you so much, Eric.

Eric King: Thank you so, so much. I'd like to welcome everyone that is joining us and I would like to start this by saying that all of us collectively would like to dedicate this to the people of Palestine for their resistance during the almost century-long occupation, and for all those who are resisting currently, including the students in the encampments all over the country, the students that are rising up and standing against imperialism and against repression. We would like to send solidarity to all of them.

Let's begin. When I was locked up, I was locked up in 2014, and that was about the time when mass incarceration was coming down a little bit. All of you did multiple decades in prison, and a lot of that was during the height of mass incarceration, so I would like to ask you all about what your experiences were like in prison during that time—in regard to your

personal experiences, whether programming, interactions with officers, interactions with other prisoners—and what you learned about prison, and maybe what you learned about society being locked up during this time period. Whoever wants to start first would be great.

David Gilbert: Well, when I came into prison in the early '80s—people have to remember that it's not a complete Iron Curtain between prison and outside society, and people in prison are very affected by what's going on outside—and the political consciousness of the '60s and '70s hadn't completely died out. You could walk down a gallery, and in some cells there would be posters of Albizu Campos and Lolita Lebrón, and in other cells there would be posters of Malcolm X. There was still a lot of political consciousness. In New York there was a tradition that went back to the Attica rebellion of people working together. Prison was very segregated in terms of social interaction. The whites unfortunately, still at least culturally, believed in white supremacy. Those were problems, but when it was time for collective action, there was that tradition of people coming together. There were still some Attica Brothers in Auburn when I arrived, like Al Victory. He was a white guy, was very respected, but he stood for people working together.

As mass incarceration built and built and built, things changed considerably. One thing is most of the constructive programs where people could do something positive, feel good about themselves, make arts and crafts for their families, they were one-by-one eliminated. People became more crowded, which is partly just the numbers with mass incarceration, but it was also the political changes in society. The correction system went more and more to a punishment mode, a punishment paradigm. There's nothing redeeming... It's almost like they wanted to create the brutes that they claim people were for their own political purposes. That made it more difficult. Certain changes, like the crack epidemic and the influx of certain drugs, but also when TVs came in, where people were allowed to get their own TV, a lot of people who would become voracious and then deep readers were more spaced out on TV, more passive.

Even so—and I said outside society is a big influence—there have been prison initiatives since then where prisoners took political leadership: most dramatically the Pelican Bay hunger strike against solitary, also the Free Alabama movement among Alabama prisoners. So, it's not like it's all

systematically profiting from the exploitation of prisoners. The book explores potential alternatives to the prison system that could transform the justice system from a punitive instrument of control and retribution into a tool capable of changing lives for the better through a combination of autobiography and academic examination. It is a core text in the prison abolition movement.

Greek austerity protests — from 2010 to 2012, Greek activists organized against austerity and the cutting of public services as a response to a debt crisis. Riots, protests, strikes, arsons, expropriations, and mass demonstrations proliferated. A high point in the Greek anarchist movement.

Mumia Abu-Jamal — an award winning journalist and was one of the founders of the Black Panther Party chapter in Philadelphia, PA. He has struggled for justice and human rights for people of color since he was at least 14 years old, the age when he joined the Party. In December of 1982, Mumia, who moonlighted by driving a taxi, happened upon police who were beating his brother. During the melee, a police officer was shot and killed. Despite the fact that many people saw someone else shoot and runaway from the scene, Mumia, in what could only be called a kangaroo court, was convicted and sentenced to death. During the summer of 1995, a death warrant was signed by Governor Tom Ridge, which sparked one of the most effective organizing efforts in defense of a political prisoner ever. Since that time, Mumia has had his death sentence overturned, but is still expected to serve the rest of his life in prison. *More information:* freemumia.com

Release Aging People in Prison — led by formerly incarcerated people and family members of people in prison, RAPP works to end mass incarceration and promote racial justice through the release of aging people in prison and those serving long sentences. *More information:* rappcampaign.com

Kathy Boudin — an anti-imperialist revolutionary and founding member of the Weather Underground. Kathy served 23 years in prison from her role in the 1981 Brink's robbery. In 1969, Boudin was a founding member of the Weatherman faction of Students for a Democratic Society, which in 1970 became the Weather Underground Organization (WUO). In 1970 she and Cathy Wilkerson were the only survivors of the Greenwich Village townhouse explosion, when a bomb that their comrades were constructing in the basement, intending to use it to attack U.S. Army personnel that evening, exploded prematurely. Boudin remained a fugitive for more than a decade, engaging in multiple additional bombings (none of which resulted in injuries) and other actions. While in prison, Kathy published articles and poems, and also co-founded AIDS Committee for Education (ACE) inside the prison in 1988 with other incarcerated women including Katrina Haslip and Judith Alice Clark to provide accurate education on living with HIV. On May 1, 2022, Kathy passed away in New York City.

capacity as a people's warrior that he was slain in combat on October 23, 1981 after he and Sekou Odinga were ambushed by NYC police and FBI agents.

Jalil Muntaqim — Jalil was 19 years old when he was arrested. He is a former member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army, and was one of the longest held political prisoners in the world. Jalil was born October 18, 1951, in Oakland, CA. His early years were spent in San Francisco. Jalil participated in NAACP youth organizing during the civil rights movement. In high school, he became a leading member of the Black Student Union, often touring in "speak-outs." After the assassination of Dr. King, Jalil began to believe a more militant response to racism and injustice was necessary. He began to look towards the Black Panther Party for Self-Defense for leadership and was recruited into the BPP by school friends who had since become Panthers. Two months shy of his 20th birthday, Jalil was captured along with Albert "Nuh" Washington in a midnight shoot-out with San Francisco police. While in San Quentin prison in California in 1976, Jalil launched the National Prisoners Campaign to Petition the United Nations to recognize the existence of political prisoners in the United States. Progressives nationwide joined this effort, and the petition was submitted in Geneva, Switzerland. This led to Lennox Hinds and the National Conference of Black Lawyers having the UN International Commission of Jurists tour U.S. prisons and speak with specific political prisoners. The International Commission of Jurists then reported that political prisoners did in fact exist in the United States. In 1997 Jalil initiated the Jericho Movement. Over 6,000 supporters gathered in the Jericho '98 march in Washington DC and the Bay Area to demand amnesty for US political prisoners on the basis of international law. The Jericho Amnesty Movement aims to gain the recognition by the U.S. government and the United Nations that political prisoners exist in this country, and that on the basis of international law, they should be granted amnesty because of the political nature of their cases.

Spirit of Mandela Coalition — a coalition founded in 2018, led by Black Liberation organizers and former Political Prisoners working with Black, Brown, and Indigenous Peoples and their allies to bring international attention to U.S. human rights violations amounting to genocide. Through its endeavors, the SoM Coalition successfully initiated the 2021 International Tribunal charging the United States government with five counts of violations based on international law, and an independent Panel of Jurists found the US guilty of genocide on all five counts. Subsequently, SoM has launched one of the most comprehensive national action campaigns/initiatives in decades - the Peoples' Senate - seeking to unify progressive and radical activists across geographic, ideological, and other divides.

Are Prisons Obsolete? — The book examines the evolution of carceral systems from their earliest incarnation to the modern prison industrial complex. Davis argues that incarceration fails to reform those it imprisons, instead

extinguished, and I'm thinking and looking, as we're all here in solidarity with Palestine and self-determination and liberation for Palestine, if the upsurge around Palestine is also leading to renewed politicization in prison. I heard that one of my friends from prison sent a solidarity message to the Columbia students

Herman Bell: I'll follow your remarks, David, because the other day there was a conversation about your message to the Columbia students and, like you mentioned, that you sent a letter of solidarity to them. In a way, it's like we, during that time you speak of, were somewhat like a fly on the wall, checking out what was going on in the world, so to speak. I'm a news-hound, and I've always been, and in the joint around that time we had just begun to get FM radios in the joints. Other than that we just had AM, and that was that. Being a news-hound, you try to keep abreast of what's going on in the world as best you can. We talk about mass incarceration, I think that Michelle Alexander's book *The New Jim Crow* is a good piece, it's a comprehensive piece, and it speaks about a predictor of incarceration and harsher sentences in US courts, and that's just a piece of it in terms of what was going on out in the streets. But the consequences of that harsh sentencing and all of that, along with the rhetoric from the various presidents like, say, Nixon, Reagan, and you could throw Bill Clinton in there, to Bush, and others. Their whole mantra was "tough on crime" and just throwing them away, throw them in the jail and lock them away forever. And then there were some changes in the use of search and seizure laws that also contributed to the increase of the prison population. And then, as David mentioned, drugs also contributed to the de-industrialization.

Of course, we know that this was intentional. There were times I looked around in the prison yard, and I see so many young Black men and Latinos in there. It's as if they came into our neighborhood with a giant net, scooped us all up and just brought them to the prison and just dropped them in the yard. It was painful times, too, in a sense. There was this guy named Sisyphus, I believe, who was sentenced to hell, and his punishment was to carry a rock up a hill, and the guy, he was devoted, he'd go up the hill, but he get so far up and he start coming back down. In prison, looking out and you're seeing so many people coming in. Well, where's the front gate? How do we get out of here? When will things ever change? That's just a tiny piece of what was going on in some respects in the jails.

Susan Rosenberg: Thank you, Herman. I was in the federal prison system. It may have looked differently, but it tracks the same as what both David and Herman are saying. I would just say, big picture, when I first went into prison, which was at the end of 1984, the prison population in the federal prison was basically small-ish, not small but smaller than it has become over the course of all of the policies of mass incarceration. It was a third white, a third Latino, and a third African-American, with some other foreign, international prisoners in the mix, and certainly that was true in the population of women. By the time I left prison, which was 16 years later, mass incarceration had become the norm, and the population numbers really had changed. 80% of the federal prison population among women were African-American. The numbers had grown, had doubled, but in that period I think the numbers of women who had been incarcerated grew by 800%, so there was a huge influx and a complete change in the population at that time. Alongside of that, there was the AIDS epidemic and crack in the '80s, the middle '80s, and the late '80s. There were really these massive epidemics that took place inside the population: that was mass incarceration, AIDS, and crack, and an increase in all kinds of drug use. The whole structure shifted in the period as a result of mass incarceration. I think part of it was I had also been and spent almost three years in the DC jail in between different places in the federal prison system, and there you could just see how it was going to play out in terms of the large numbers of young Black people from DC who were in jail who then got sent to the federal system. I think that the quality of life inside changed. As David put it, the punishment paradigm took over. It was always there, but I think it increased enormously. The communities in women's federal prisons, certainly from my experience, went through changes, huge changes, negative changes. The quality and content of people's lives got much worse. That would be what I would say in terms of the specific question.

Herman Bell: Also I would add, at that time inside we were looking around for some explanation, for some reason that was causing the nation to go in the direction that it was headed. There was really no explanation, but then we have to be mindful that that was also around the time when the US was de-industrializing, industrialists are running, leaving the country, going to Asia, Mexico, in pursuit of cheap labor. But then that left a lot of idle citizens in the country who really had no jobs and what not. My take is that they had capitalized on this fact and started throwing them in the prisons and exploiting that situation, and thus they still make money.

convicted of the murder of a New York City police oficer, and, while maintaining his innocence to this day, sentenced to 25 years to life in prison. Imprisoned for nearly forty years, Seth has long since served his sentence. Seth first came up for parole in 1998, but prison officials have refused to release him, focusing on his involvement with the Black Panther Party and his knowledge as to the whereabouts of Assata Shakur and not his conduct while imprisoned. While in prison, Seth has worked as a librarian, pre-release advisor, and AIDS counselor, mentoring younger prisoners and continuing to struggle for his people. Seth passed away at the age of 72 on December 24, 2019.

Bashir Hameed — a member of the Black Panther Party and the Black Liberation Army. Formerly James York, Hameed was born and raised in New Jersey. In 1982, Bashir and a former BPP comrade, Abdul Majid (formerly Anthony LaBorde), were charged and later convicted of the murder of two police officers, a case known as the Queens Two. In almost three decades of incarceration, Bashir, a devout Muslim, applied his religious and political principles to the struggle against injustice and racism behind the walls, gaining wide respect among prisoners. Bashir passed away on August 30, 2008 at the age 67, from complications of a triple bypass surgery at the New York prison system.

Panther 21 — a group of twenty-one Black Panther members who were arrested and accused of planned coordinated bombing and long-range rifle attacks on two police stations and an education office in New York City in 1969, who were all acquitted by a jury in May 1971, after revelations during the trial that police infiltrators played key organizing roles. Among the defendants were Afeni Shakur, Lumumba Shakur, Ali Bey Hassan, Michael Tabor, Dhoruba al-Mujahid bin Wahad, Jamal Joseph, Abayama Katara, Baba Odinga, Joan Bird, Robert Collier, Sundiata Acoli, Lonnie Epps, Curtis Powell, Kuwasi Balagoon, Richard Harris, Lee Berry, Lee Roper, and Kwando Kinshasa, and Thomas Berry.

Algeria — after the revolutionary FLN defeated French colonial forces during their struggle for liberation, activists and liberation movements from around the world gathered in Algiers, including contingents from the National Liberation Front of South Vietnam, the African National Congress (ANC), and the Black Panther Party. Eldridge and Kathleen Cleaver, the first Black Panthers in Algeria, helped to set up a local headquarters that would soon welcome Donald Cox, Sekou Odinga, and Larry Mack, as the Black Panther Party would embrace international revolutionary struggles, Black and Arab alike. Multiple American radicals hijacked planes to Algeria for safety with the BPP office. After splits among the Party, the office gradually ceased to exist.

Mtayari Shabaka Sundiata — became a citizen of record in the Republic of New Afrika in 1968. Mtayari worked among the youth in the Ocean Hill-Brownsville section of Brooklyn. In 1970 he was incarcerated as the result of a shootout with the police. Upon his release, he joined the ranks of the BLA. It was in this

continued to work for freedom for political prisoners, and in his later years moved to Tanzania, where he passed away in 2011.

Sekou Odinga — Sekou was forced into hiding in 1969 when he and twenty other Black Panther Party members were wrongly charged with criminal conspiracy in the NY Panther 21 case. Several months later, while still underground, he traveled to Algeria to establish an international chapter of the Black Panther Party. Later, Sekou became an activist in the New Afrikan Independence Movement and a member of the Black Liberation Army. On October 23, 1981, Sekou and Mtyari Shabaka Sundiata were ambushed by the NYC police and FBI agents. The police murdered Mtyari. Sekou was eventually captured, tortured, and eventually charged with the liberation of Assata Shakur and the expropriation of money from an armored car. Sekou was convicted of two federal charges under the Racketeering Influenced and Corrupt Organization (RICO) Act and was sentence to forty years imprisonment and a $50,000 fine. He was also convicted of six state counts of attempted murder stemming from the defense of himself and Mtyari during the police attack in 1981. For this he was sentenced to concurrent life sentences. Sekou released from prison on November 25, 2014 and passed away on January 12, 2024, at the age of 79.

Teddy Jah Heath — Teddy Jah Heath was active in the Black Liberation and Civil Rights Movement in the 60s. In 1968 he joined the Black Panther Party. On May 2, 1973 Jah was arrested again and charged with kidnapping a drug dealer. This politically motivated trail occurred amidst government orchestrated hysteria around the Black Liberation Army, of which Jah was a member. He was given a life sentence by an all-white jury for an alleged kidnapping, in which no one was injured. Teddy Jah Heath served almost thirty years and passed away of cancer in 2001.

Albert Nuh Washington — a member of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army. In the early 1970s, after years active in the Black liberation struggle, Nuh was shot and captured together Jalil Muntaqim. Along with Herman Bell, they were charged with murdering two cops and became known as the New York 3. Their crime, in the eyes of this system, was their revolutionary politics and their determination to win the liberation of Black people. In secret, resources of the FBI and other authorities were mobilized to railroad these fighters to prison. He passed away from cancer in the U.S. prison system on April 28, 2000.

Robert Seth Hayes — after the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr. and the social upheaval which followed it, Robert Seth Hayes joined the Black Panther Party, working in the Party's free medical clinics and free breakfast programs. Like many other activists, Seth was forced underground by FBI and police repression of the Panther movement. Once underground, Seth joined the Black Liberation Army. In 1973, following a shootout with police, Seth was arrested and

I will note that the warden at Marion when I was there in '74, I believe, his name was Charlie Fenton, and when he retired as warden, he was hired by the Corrections Association of America, he became their first warden, and that was the very first private prison that they had initiated here in the country, and then more and more private prisons started to spring up, and they were largely financed by Wall Street. That is something that we can't overlook either.

Susan Rosenberg: I just wanted to add that in that same period that you're talking about, what happened was the prison sentences changed, right, they got longer and longer and longer. The power of the prosecution in criminal trials got more and more consolidated. The whole apparatus during mass incarceration, not that there hasn't always been racial capitalism and what all of that oppression and exploitation entails, but, literally, the criminal legal system shifted under Reagan, past Reagan, where law and order—"law and order" is a catchphrase—but the structures also changed within the system to oppress and control larger and larger numbers of people. I know everyone knows this, but this country still imprisons more people than any other place, and it really took a step forward during that period. There's still that number of people inside. The idea that mass incarceration is over, I think you could debate that, but it feels the same in terms of numbers now.

David Gilbert: If I can, I just want to talk about the connection between political prisoners and mass incarceration, because in addition with the de-industrialization the main thing that was going on is that this country was stressed by the level of rebellion. The Black Liberation movement was a spearhead of that, and it inspired other internal colonies and inspired a women's movement, environmental movement, and there's actually documentation that President Nixon said—it was in the diary of Haldeman, his main advisor—the problem in this country is the Blacks, and we have to do something about it, without saying that's what we're doing. They had a two-fold strategy, and it's what links political prisoners and mass incarceration. One was to destroy the revolutionary Black movement with assassination and imprisonment—vicious. But the other was—it was a rebellious Black community, there were urban uprisings in hundreds of cities—the war on drugs and mass incarceration. They knew making drugs illegal or prosecuting it wouldn't end drug use. They had gone through that with abolition and alcohol, it doesn't work. But it was an excuse... And it's not when you put people in prison, it's not just that

there are two million people in cages, they have families that are missing breadwinners, who are missing stabilizing influences, communities. It was a conscious strategy to incapacitate the Black community.

Eric King: You're absolutely right. Thank you for sharing. Thank all of you for those answers. One of the things that impacted me greatly while I was inside was meeting so many non-political prisoners. One of the best friends I made inside was someone named Randy Platt, and he's currently at the federal supermax in ADX, and the way that we bonded was because, while he was in prison, the person who taught him his GED class was Dr. Shakur, Dr. Mutulu Shakur, and that's how I was able to connect with this social prisoner was through the impact that Mutulu had on his life. So, I'd like to ask you all, as political prisoners, as highly political people in general, what were the connections that you made with social prisoners? Did you see it as a need to radicalize? Did you learn from them? Were you able to build strong ties and strong bonds with prisoners who weren't inherently political at least in their crimes? David, we can start with you.

David Gilbert: I learned a lot from so-called social prisoners, a tremendous amount, and there's tremendous solidarity, people really looked out and supported us. A couple of different times, prisoners who work cleaning up offices, you know, that was their job, cleaning up the offices, found a memo about how they're going to harass me or come at me, and made a point of telling me about it. But I also learned—I mean, I had been underground for 10 years before I was busted, I had learned how to function clandestinely, but I had never been in such a totalitarian atmosphere, and a lot of the so-called social prisoners hadn't given up on organizing, hadn't given up on ways of finding how to do things, so there was a lot of ingenuity, a lot of determination. The other thing I learned was the importance of community, that even though there were different philosophies and different approaches, we're all in the same situation, we have to work together. As to whether trying to politicize people, first, you don't come in with a big pontificating to people. You have to show respect, and you have to listen, and you have to learn from people, and you have to realize there'll be disagreements. Of course, I tried to talk with white prisoners about racism. Actually, early on there were a couple who did identify with the movement, one of whom had been mentored by Herman Bell, but the mainstream among white prisoners was still white supremacist, not as overt as in the feds or in California, because whites were a minority, so they didn't want a race war. I have to say without

prison, where she wrote on women in prison, solitary confinement, political prisoner support, and revolutionary poetry. Marilyn passed away on August 3, 2010.

Kuwasi Balagoon — a Black anarchist revolutionary, and member of the Black Panther Party and Black Liberation Army. Kuwasi was initially part of the Panther 21 case, but although the Panther 21 were later acquitted, Kuwasi's case was separated off and he was convicted of a New Jersey bank robbery. While serving his sentence, Kuwasi became disillusioned with the Black Panther Party and drifted into the more radical Black Liberation Army while also ideologically embracing Black anarchism. During the 1970s, Kuwasi would escape prison twice, and during his second period on the run, would be involved in breaking Assata Shakur out of prison in 1979. In 1981 Kuwasi was amongst the several BLA, May 19 Communist Organization and Weather Underground members involved in the 1981 Brinks robbery. Following his capture in 1982, Kuwasi would be tried and sentenced to life for his involvement. While in prison, Kuwasi passed away of pneumocystis pneumonia brought about by AIDS on December 13, 1986. He was 39 years old. Kuwasi authored several texts while in prison, a lot of which are compiled in *Kuwasi Balagoon: A Soldier's Story*.

Dr. Mutulu Shakur — a Black Liberation Army political prisoner who was sentenced to 60 years in prison for his involvement in the Brinks robbery. Dr. Shakur was active as a teen in the Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM), a Black Nationalist group that struggled for Black self-determination and socialist change in America. Dr. Shakur also worked very closely with the Black Panther Party, supporting Lumumba and Zayd Shakur. He was a member of the Provisional Government of the Republic of New Afrika, which endorsed the founding of an independent New Afrikan (Black) Republic and the establishment of an independent Black state in the southern U.S. In the 70's Dr. Shakur worked with the Lincoln Detox program, which offered drug rehabilitation for heroin addiction using acupuncture. Dr. Shakur was one of several Black Liberation Army members to carry out the October 1981 Brinks robbery, aided by the May 19 Communist Organization and former members of the Weather Underground. In June 2022, it was revealed that Dr. Shakur had terminal bone marrow cancer with "six months to live." Dr. Shakur passed away from the disease on July 7, 2023, at age 72, about eight months after being paroled.

Geronimo Pratt — Geronimo Ji-Jaga, affectionately known as "G," was a major figure in the Black Liberation Struggle. Recruited into the Black Panther Party by Bunchy Carter and John Huggins, both of whom were assassinated by COINTELPRO infiltrators in 1969. Geronimo became the Deputy Minister of Defense of the Souther California Black Panther Party. Geronimo was convicted on informant and infiltrators' false testimony for a murder he did not commit and spent 27 years in prison, until his conviction was vacated in 1997 on the grounds that the prosecution concealed exculpatory evidence. Geronimo

two life sentences in federal prison. The struggle for Leonard's freedom is not over. *More information:* whoisleonardpeltier.info

Veronza Bowers — a former Black Panther political prisoner who was sentenced to life for the killing of a forest ranger in 1973. Bowers maintained his innocence, arguing that he was the target of FBI's COINTELPRO, supported by the fact that his conviction rested on the testimony of two informants who received thousands of dollars and a reduction in their sentence. After a failed attempt at self-liberation from Lompoc, Veronza focused on spirituality and healing medicine and has released meditational music. Veronza released on May 7, 2024, after 51 years inside.

Rafael Cancel Miranda — a Puerto Rican independentista, revolutionary, and poet. Rafael, along with Lolita Lebrón, Andrés Figueroa Cordero, and Irvin Flores Rodríguez, attacked the House of Representatives in 1954. Rafael joined pro-independence political groups as a youth, after his family survived the Ponce massacre, when police opened fire on a march commemorating the abolition of slavery in Puerto Rico. Rafael was later sentenced to two years in prison for refusing the draft, and upon release self-exiled to Cuba, where he stayed until the Batista coup and was expelled. In New York, he met other Puerto Rican independentistas and became involved in the attack on the House, a continuation of the pro-independence uprisings that began in 1950 in Puerto Rico. Rafael received a prison sentence of 85 years, which was commuted in 1979, after 25 years. After his commutation, Rafael authored nine books and remained active in the struggle for Puerto Rican independence. He continued to carry the cause of independence until his death. Rafael passed away in San Juan, Puerto Rico on March 2, 2020.

Certain Days — a freedom for political prisoners calendar begun by Herman Bell, Robert Seth Hayes, and David Gilbert, which is organized by outside organizers, current and former political prisoners, and includes art and writings by political prisoners. *More information*: certaindays.org

Marilyn Buck — an anti-imperialist revolutionary who was imprisoned for her participation in the 1979 prison escape of Assata Shakur, the 1981 Brinks robbery, and the 1983 US Senate bombing. Marilyn joined Students for a Democratic Society (SDS) during the height of activism against the Vietnam war while at the University of Texas. In 1967 she moved to Chicago where she edited the SDS newsletter New Left Notes, and incorporated Marxist feminism into the organization's politics. In San Francisco, she worked with Third World Newsreel, a media collective that showcased anti-imperialist and anti-colonialist struggles around the world. Convicted for purchasing ammunition for the Black Liberation Army in 1973, she was sentenced to 10 years in prison, furloughed in 1977, and went underground instead of returning to prison. After her capture and convictions in 1985, she was sentenced to 80 years in federal

getting too long winded, most of my work didn't do that much good. I would say more that I was an example of a white guy who was respected because they had a heavy case who didn't abide by the segregation, who worked with everybody, who admired and respected especially the ex-Panthers.

We helped renew the tradition of working together for prisoners' rights. When we started the AIDS work, we were bringing back together the most respected people in each of the communities, and that's why the prison reacted so hostilely, and that's why I went through a lot of repression. But it was an example, and it was also an occasion to at least attenuate the prevailing homophobia, because we talked about, if we're doing AIDS work, we have to treat everybody with respect. It was more the examples of the work we did that had some impact, but I can't say, "Ah, here's the formula of how you talk to people who are white supremacists and win them over." I wasn't that successful at that.

Susan Rosenberg: It makes sense what you say, David, a lot. I would say, I think the solidarity that people gave us as the political people who had heavy cases and stood for the things that they thought we stood for or that we did stand for was the best, most important part of being inside of prison, this solidarity. The solidarity that we received was on multiple levels. So-called social prisoners were the majority of people that I spent 16 years with, so I don't think of them quite as social prisoners. I think of them as my friends who were inside and people who were imprisoned for their own reasons. I made a lot of friends inside, and some of those people are still my dear, dear, dear friends. I think where we were able to have community and do work, that's where there was an impact. One-on-ones were very, very hard. I also tried to talk with white women prisoners about race and about the issues that were going on in the prison with some limited success, but we ended up doing a lot of educational work through the education programs there, and AIDS advocacy, and teaching courses in history, American history, and Black history, and other courses, English, and a wide range of things. In those situations, there was more success where we built collectivity, and it was integrated. I would say, from the very moment that I went to the DC Jail where what the police said about all of us in the Resistance Conspiracy Case was that we were part of the Klan, which was their strategy to have everybody attack us inside of the DC jail, but they locked us all down, so of course people were like, "Well, who are these white people in this prison with us?" And people

wanted to know, and so you tell people, “Don’t go near them.” Well, of course, everybody was right at our doors talking with us from the very beginning. That kind of solidarity over time got built into respect. I had a really great friend, and the first time we met in the DC jail, she came to my cell, and she gave me an orange and a Snickers bar and said, “I don’t believe them,” and we kind of went from there. But, again, in the feds you get moved a lot. They really don’t want anybody to be able to build stability, to be able to organize, so I would say that.

Eric King: I remember that anecdote from your book also, when you’re talking about the person with the orange, and that really affected me, because I read that while in the shoe, and a Jihadi bro had brought me a bag of coffee, and he had slid it under the door for me, because the guards were just on this bullshit time, and so he had looked out for me. That really impacted me reading that you had gone through something very similar.

Susan Rosenberg: Very similar, yes.

Eric King: Alright, Herman, to you please.

Herman Bell: I remember probably reading Susan’s book at some later point of my stay in prison, where these marshals were transporting her to another location, she was at MCC, and they were boasting about this pretty new car, spanking brand new, that they had in the basement, and that she was going to be the first one to ride up in it, you know, a ride is a ride, so they got to the basement, and Susan said it was a Mercedes Benz, and she told them, “You’re not going to put me in that Nazi wagon,” or whatever it was. She refused to go. But, of course, they just picked her up, and threw her in there. But I was so, so proud of the response she gave them. It was really sweet. It made my day, in fact. I still think about it sometimes. I mean, we have to have a certain amount of levity under those circumstances. You have to find it somewhere, otherwise it just makes existence in there much harder.

We were different as political prisoners, simply because of the heavy case we had, and all the political implications regarding that. Speaking for myself, but I’m sure it applies to all my comrades as well, nobody knew quite what to make of us or or what to expect of us, and I’m talking about the prison class as well as the authorities. We were just there, and, as far

related to the incident. Upon his release, Jamil opened a grocery store in Atlanta, which he maintained until 2000 when he was arrested for the murder of a Fulton County cop. Later that year, another man confessed to the shooting. In 2002 Jamil, was convicted and sentenced to life without parole. *More information:* whathappened2rap.com

Kamau Sadiki — a former member of the Black Liberation Army (BLA), who is currently serving a life sentence for the killing of an Atlanta police officer in 1971. With the US counter-insurgency program COINTELPRO that attempted to neutralize and destroy revolutionary organizations like the Black Panther Party, many members felt they had no choice but to go underground or risk imprisonment and death, which Sadiki did in 1971. In 1973 he was captured as part of a federal stakeout for a bank expropriation and was tried with his co-defendant Assata Shakur—which ended first in a mistrial and after a second trial with a jury acquittal. In 1974, he was tried in another bank expropriation, found guilty, and sentenced to 5 years in prison. During these trials, Assata was pregnant with a child she shared with Sadiki. She would later escape to Cuba. Sadiki’s case was part of a renewed campaign during the early 2000’s to target former revolutionaries from the 1960s and 70s. Sadiki has claimed his innocence, stating that the government refused to allow testimony that would exonerate him and used his case as a way to pressure Sadiki to help in capturing Assata. Sadiki was convicted and sentenced in 2003. His health continues to deteriorate to this day, and support for his liberation is crucial. *More information*: freekamau.com

Leonard Peltier — a Native American political prisoner serving two consecutive life sentences for a crime he was set up for—the killing of two FBI agents. In the early 70’s, Native Americans on the Pine Ridge Reservation were assaulted and murdered by a group of vigilantes and looked towards the American Indian Movement (AIM) for help. Hundreds of AIM members occupied the village of Wounded Knee in Pine Ridge in 1973, demanding an end to the US-backed murder and intimidation of AIM supporters on the reservation and that the treaties signed by the US be honored that gave the Lakota people the right to self-rule the land surrounding the Black Hills. Federal authorities surrounded the occupation with an army of over 300. The Indians refused to back down. They used weapons to defend themselves and held off the government forces for 73 days. After the siege, Leonard came to Pine Ridge with a few other AIM members in 1975 and set up camp in the village of Oglala to protect the village from vigilantes. On July 26, 1975 two FBI agents drove into the property unannounced and unidentified, and a firefight erupted, leaving the two FBI agents and one AIM member dead, while scores of FBI agents and US Marshals surrounded the property. It’s believed that the attack against the AIM activists was an attempt to create a diversion for a secret agreement to transfer parts of the Pine Ridge Reservation to the federal government. With fabricated evidence and preventing Leonard from claiming self-defense, Leonard was convicted to

associated revolutionary Sam Melville. On September 17, the Weather Underground launched a retaliatory attack on the New York Department of Corrections, exploding a bomb near the commissioner's office. The communiqué accompanying the attack called the prison system an example of "how a society run by white racists maintains its control," with white supremacy being the "main question white people have to face."

Attica Brothers — survivors of the Attica rebellion were known as "Attica Brothers," especially those facing legal trouble in the aftermath.

Pelican Bay Hunger Strike — in July 2013 up to 30,000 prisoners in California engaged in a two month hunger strike to protest solitary confinement, organized across racial and gang lines by prisoners in solitary.

Free Alabama Movement — along with Incarcerated Workers Organizing Committee (IWOC), Free Alabama Movement organized the 2016 U.S. prison work strike that involved over 24,000 prisoners refusing work in 24 states. The strike began on September 9, 2016, the 45th anniversary of the Attica Prison rebellion.

The New Jim Crow — a 2010 book by Michelle Alexander that essentially argues mass incarceration is an extension of Jim Crow racial stratification.

AIDS work — many political prisoners, like David Gilbert and Susan Rosenberg, engaged in prison education groups around HIV/AIDS. David Gilbert began organizing around this after his friend and codefendant, Kuwasi Balagoon, died of AIDS in 1986.

Resistance Conspiracy Case — the case charging defendants Marilyn Buck, Linda Evans, Susan Rosenberg, Laura Whitehorn, Timothy Blunk, and Alan Berkman for the 1983 bombing of the US Senate in retaliation for US military involvement in Lebanon and Granada by the Armed Resistance Unit.

Jamil Al-Amin — formerly known as H. Rap Brown, the Imam came to prominence in the 1960s as chairman of the Student Nonviolent Coordinating Committee (SNCC) and the Justice Minister of the Black Panther Party. He is perhaps most famous for his proclamation during that period that "violence is as American as cherry pie," as well as once stating that "If America don't come around, we're gonna burn it down." In 1968, Jamil went underground after facing weapons and incitement to riot charges following a rally that occurred in Cambridge, Maryland which left Jamil with a shotgun wound to the head. After 18 months in hiding and on the FBI's Most Wanted list, Jamil resurfaced in an attack of a New York City bar which was targeted for its exploitation of the community. This action resulted in a shootout with police that left Jamil and two cops with injuries. Jamil subsequently spent 5 years in prison for charges

as I'm concerned, I was good with that, because prison is a very dangerous place, there's no doubt about it, and, as you know, there are people in there—guards and prisoners—they will test you. I maintained a certain posture inside the prison, and I maintained that throughout. I do have a heavy case, and there were men who were reluctant to approach me as a normal person like everybody else, to chat about this or that, you know, just be people with people. That being the case, I decided to become a bit more active in institutional sports such as basketball and football and things like that. I chose to do that. I was not in favor of participating in institutional sports, but I chose to do so, because that makes me a bit more available to the rest of the guys in the joint, and they can pull up to me and say, "Hey, what's up! Nice game," or "You called that game very well," or whatever, and once they open up, then that enabled me, without standing on a soap box, right, to talk to them like I would talk to my brother or one of my children or whatever the case may be, and, therefore I could get my message across. In terms of what is happening in the world, what is happening in the jails, what is happening in interpersonal relationships. For the most part we were well-received by the prison population in the various joints that we were in. As Susan pointed out, David knows as well, they moved us around a lot, and they didn't want us to maintain a lasting relationship with the prison class. From joint to joint, it kind of built up. People look to you, they think of you, and they respect you, but, of course, they expect you to comport yourself in such a way that you don't disappoint them, because if you disappoint them, then they start hating you, and then they start disrespecting you, and it goes off into other things. I'll leave it there for now.

David Gilbert: I just want to add a comment from being in the same system as Herman. His skill as a quarterback was legendary throughout New York. More importantly, I mentioned that he mentored this one white guy who became pretty conscious. You don't know, and you probably don't know, Herman, how many, mainly young Black prisoners, but other people too, came up to me and said, "I was mentored by Herman Bell." I'm not exaggerating. That was widespread. That's widespread. People were proud of that, and they were in the process of becoming politically conscious too.

Eric King: Herman, I'd like to ask you, because you did both state and federal time, was there a difference between how you were received in New York state or Louisiana versus how you were received at Marion?

Herman Bell: New York state is a state prison, and the state prisons, especially New York state, are different than the prison system in the feds. In some ways the feds is a bit more dangerous in a sense. I saw a lot of bodies, a number of people being bodied in the fed system, and you've been there, so you know it's a very dangerous place. At the time that I was in the feds, Susan pointed it out in regards to mass incarceration, like when she had made parole, but the time that I was in the federal system, the system wasn't as large as it grew to be. I think they had maybe 8,000 10,000 federal prisoners, if that. It was very small, and most of the prisoners in the fed system were like professional crooks or whatever you may want to call them, but they were mostly professional. They hung paper, yes, they rob banks. I ran into a few of the guys who was in the... You remember the movie, *The French Connection*? There's a variety of colorful people, but they're a different kind of a prison class. Now, for example in Washington DC, they have no state prison system. They send all their prisoners to the federal system. I have happened to meet some of the guys out of the DC area, and I had never run across human beings like that in a prison system. They call them the DC boys. I've never seen a bunch of men that was so tight, you know, so close-knit, and even the guards had to pull back and give them that amount of respect. But here the system started changing just as I started leaving out in '79 going into the state, and that was because of the drugs epidemic that was going on, and that was because the state, the federal laws had started changing, and the sentencing laws were changing such that a lot more people were coming in, and also they were filtered into the federal system, so that now I have no idea what the numbers are, but it's probably tripled since I was in that system. So, there's a difference. In New York State it's a bit different.

Eric King: Thank you. One of the reasons why me and Josh rushed to get out *Rattling the Cages* is that people grow old. We've lost a lot of fighters recently, and we still have a lot inside. We still have Jamil [Al-Amin], we still have Mr. [Kamau] Sadiki, we still have Leonard [Peltier]. I'd like to give each of you a chance, if you'd like, to speak about comrades you lost inside or brothers and sisters we might still have inside, if you'd like to talk about any memories you have, or any interesting anecdotes you'd like to share, just to honor those that we've lost or that are still locked down. Herman, you're up.

Herman Bell: You mentioned Leonard [Peltier], and then also there's

People, Places, Events, & Organizations

Albizu Campos — president of the Partido Nacionalista de Puerto Rico (the Puerto Rican Nationalist Party) from 1930 til his death in 1965. Albizu led the October 1950 mass revolt against US colonialism that was brutally suppressed. Albizu was imprisoned for 26 years throughout his life for struggling for independence. Albizu died in 1965 shortly after his pardon and release from federal prison; he had alleged that he was the subject of human radiation experiments in prison.

Lolita Lebrón — a revolutionary Puerto Rican independentista. Lolita led a guerrilla cadre in the United States that attacked the US House of Representatives chamber in the US capitol on March 1, 1954 to "draw attention to the fact of Puerto Rico's continued colonial status." A political prisoner for 25 years, her sentence was commuted, and she returned to Puerto Rico, where she continued the fight for independence and participated in the protests against the United States Navy's presence in Vieques. In 1979, Lolita Lebrón, Irvin Flores, Rafael Cancel Miranda and Oscar Collazo were recognized as the embodiment of the directive of their teacher Albizu Campos to exercise valor and sacrifice before representatives of fifty-one countries at the International Conference in Support of Independence for Puerto Rico, held in Mexico City. She passed away on August 1, 2010.

Malcolm X — a Black revolutionary and Nation of Islam spokesman. During the Civil Rights Movement, Malxolm X advocated for freedom "by any means necessary." After leaving the Nation of Islam, Malcolm traveled to Africa and West Asia, meeting with revolutionary Pan-African socialist leaders such as Kwame Nkrumah, Ben Bella, Gamal Abdel Nasser, and others. Before his assassination, Malxolm converted to Sunni Islam, and after completing the Hajj to Mecca he became known as "el-Hajj Malik el-Shabazz." Malcolm connected with the communist Revolutionary Action Movement (RAM) and advocated revolutionary Black internationalism, before he was assassinated on February 21, 1965.

Attica Rebellion — a September 9, 1971 rebellion by thousands of prisoners at the New York state prison. Answering George Jackson's call in his writings for prisoners to take a revolutionary role, prisoners at Attica organized around a list of 27 demands regarding improvements in living conditions that were left unanswered. Many prisoners, like Joseph Little, who told a government panel, "I'm not for no penitentiary reform. I'm for abolishing the whole concept of penitentiary reform," saw the prison as a site of revolutionary warfare. New York Governor Rockerfeller and President Nixon ordered hundreds of state troopers and prison guards to take back the prison with force, leaving 10 correctional officers and 29 prisoners dead by police fire. Many prisoners were assassinated after the siege for their organizing, like Weather Underground-

Libertie Valence: Yes, thanks to all of you. I also want to shout out our friends at AK press who put together this incredible volume, which I hope folks will pick up, and also Josh Davidson, who did a lot of behind the scene work to make the book and tonight happen. Thank you so much, Josh. Y'all are incredible. It's been such a pleasure tonight. I wish we could spend more time together, but it was a real gift to be here tonight.

Veronza [Bowers]. I spent time with Veronza in Atlanta, but I met Leonard at Marion. He had just been deported from Canada, where he was captured, and they dropped him off at Marion. I happened to also be there with Rafael Cancel Miranda, one of the Puerto Rican nationalists, which was cool, I mean, I had good company there, it was fine. I had heard a lot about Leonard, but I wanted to check Leonard out as a person, you know, see what happened, see what kind of a dude he was. That was quite interesting. We spent time together in the yard, in the blocks, wherever. We had our political discussions along with Rafael, so it really was a fun time, a special time for me, because I got the opportunity to hang with those guys for a minute. I spent a bit of time in Atlanta, which is where Veronza was.

Eric King: Atlanta USP?

Herman Bell: USP, yeah. It was not long after I was there that the Mariel boat people, Fidel was kind enough to empty his jails and send them over to the US, and they discovered that it was a lot of miscreants and bad people who was committing all kinds of crimes in Florida, so they told Fidel, "Hey, hey, take 'em back." Fidel said, "No, no, no. Ain't nothing happening." They didn't know what to do with 'em, so they brought a lot of them, they brought 'em to Atlanta and housed them there. It was a pleasant time there in Atlanta hanging with Veronza and a few of the brothers there. Back to Leonard, Leonard fancied himself as an artist, he was learning to draw. I thought it was quite amusing, right, so fast forward, in our calendar, *Certain Days*, one day I looked up, and I saw this picture of a horse, and it was credited to Leonard, and the horse looked good, I said, "Oh, wow, he's really, really upped his game. That's so cool."

My hope is that we all get out, and that has not been the case. Some of us have come out, some of us remain in there, and that's very hurtful.

Susan Rosenberg: I think when Marilyn Buck and Dr. Mutulu Shakur were on trial in New York, a number of us who were political prisoners were called to New York to possibly testify in their trial, but we were called there also to do work on some of the motions that they were working on for their case. *The Political Prisoner Offense Exception* was a paper, David, I know you remember, and Geronimo Pratt was there. He was one of the people who worked on that, and he passed. He got out, which was a great victory, but he passed not that long after, a couple of years after he got

out. There's so many. One of the things I was so struck by in your book, in Rattling the Cages, was the breadth of people that you include, and how many people who are political from across different movements in so many different ways who have been incarcerated. There's really so many people and people that we don't mention anymore, and I've been thinking about Geronimo in the context of this past year, it's not even a year, that so many of the Black political prisoners have passed away. I spent the last decade working on Dr. Shakur's case and was an associate and a comrade of his for 45 years. Yeah, a long time. His fight to get out, his fight to be heard politically, I think was really intertwined with the battle for his release, You know, we're at a place where people are getting compassionate release, if they get that, and I'm sure K'Sisay is going to talk about that also. At the edge of the door, kick them out. You know what it means for people to be released so that they can die on the outside, and, while that's better than dying on the inside, it's a mixed victory, or it's a mixed success at fighting the state in that particular way. I think Dr. Shakur and Sekou Odinga and there are others, many others, I think we need to remember them all, the known and the lesser known. Thinking about Marilyn Buck, and Marilyn Buck getting out, I see your shirt, Eric, love that shirt, it's a really beautiful picture of Marilyn, but just numbers of people whose lives, I think, are important to know, important for the movement now to know and to understand some of those people who are not front of mind anymore, understandably, because time and change happens, and there's a whole new, multiple new generations, but I feel very sad about who we've lost in the last couple of years. These were giants in the revolutionary movement, and they will always for me be in the present.

Eric King: They are our giants. David, will you go?

David Gilbert: Sure. First of all in New York, I mean, as Susan just said, we've lost so many really wonderful people who have a lot to contribute and did contribute from prison, but it would be great if they could continue to have dialogue with the younger generation, because we learned from each other. As we age, it's sort of natural that we're going to lose some comrades physically. We keep what they taught us, or what they did, or what lives on after them, but prison takes a tremendous toll. It's poor medical care, it's poor diet, it's high stress. All of those things shorten people's lives. In New York state I had the honor and learned a tremendous amount from doing time with several of the ex-Panthers and

In terms of political work now, I have to say, I haven't caught my stride, I'm not doing very much, unfortunately. Some dialogues with people working in mass incarceration on how to bring in internationalism. The group that I was closest to was RAPP, Release Aging People in Prison, and it's a good example of the synergy between work against mass incarceration and political prisoner work. It was started by two released political prisoners: Kathy Boudin and Laura Whitehorn, and the third person was a comrade of mine in prison struggles, Mujahid Farid. Part of the concept was that this would be a route to get at least some of the political prisoners out, but it was also a way to show how cruel and unusual the prison system is. They're an organization that isn't just an NGO, isn't an NGO living off grants, they out there organizing. Since I've moved from New York, I'm not working as closely, I moved out west to be with my family, which is wonderful. But one advantage to being free from prison, none of us are completely free being out of prison, is being able to go to a number of Free Palestine demonstrations, and that's been extraordinary.

Eric King: Brilliant. Thank you. Thank you so much.

While I have people here, I would like to shout out those in ADX, those in control units, those in supermax prisons. Please, folks, please include them in your support. Please include them in your letter writing, your campaigns, your book sendings. Let's not forget those that don't get to see sunlight.

I'd like to thank everyone. I'd like to thank all the panelists. K'Sisay, thank you for speaking about your father. This has been a real blessing and honor for me to get to talk with all three of you and get to share your experiences with you. Thank you so much. Thank you, Libertie at Firestorm for having us. This is a real honor. Thank you.

David Gilbert: And thank you, Eric, for coming out.

Susan Rosenberg: Thank you, Eric, really.

David Gilbert: ...despite all the difficulties in prison and for organizing this.

Eric King: I love you all so much. For real.

talked about and Herman talked about and I also experience as an elder in our movement. I want to really write about the last couple of years of my experience in supporting both the freedom of Dr. [Mutulu] Shakur and the struggle that Sekou Odinga waged in the last part of his life, which was, as David said, just a heroic battle to continue to participate in a revolutionary manner in his own life. We don't see that that much in our society, this is not who we get exposed to. And as a white person fighting white supremacy within those situations, what can I bring to the moment now. That's my challenge to myself in this period.

Eric King: Thank you. Before I move on to David, I don't want to make you three uncomfortable, but I hope you know how importantly the youth still value you, even though I don't know if I'm considered a youth, but all three of you were so motivational at least in my life and my comrades' lives. When I was 17, I had a Kuwasi Balagoon Appreciation Society, and our whole job was going around letting air out of the tires of cop cars. We were just young anarchists trying to rebel. And then all of your books, at least Susan's and David's, your books are still circulating. People still text me about, "Where can I get this? Where can I read that?" I hope all of you understand the impact that you have on the youth still today and just how valuable your actions, words, and thoughts are to all of us.

David, please, if you have anything going on, anything you want to talk about, please share.

David Gilbert: I want to say that when people read *Rattling the Cages*, there a lot of different experiences in different situations, but every single person talks about how important outside support was. It was crucial to me to be able to not just survive and counter repression, but to actually get to a point where I could do some useful work, some productive work. Outside support is crucial, but to get to what you were saying, Eric, it goes two ways. Political prisoners have a lot to offer, they're not just individuals that deserve support. There's a lot of experience that people can learn from, not mimic, but to learn from. But it goes two ways. As political prisoners, people have a responsibility to help pass on the lessons, and that's both to affirm what we stand for, to not cave under the pressure, or give up our principles, and everybody in this book did a good job, but also to analyze our mistakes, so that people don't repeat those mistakes. So, I just wanted to talk about that two-way process.

BLA. Herman and I were together for a bit of time. They would break things up, and at the end they would spread us all out. So many beautiful, courageous, brilliant brothers. Some people aren't even well-known. Jah Teddy Heath, and, of course, my co-defendant and dear friend, Kuwasi Balagoon, and [Albert] Nuh Washington, brilliant, very spiritual brother, Seth Hayes, Robert Seth Hayes. These are people I did time with and had developed friendships with. There are other people like Bashir Hameed—I should have made a list of the names.

I want to talk briefly about Sekou Odinga, who didn't die in prison, who got out and did great work once he got out after doing 30 some years, but I want to talk about him, because he just joined the ancestors three months ago, and this wasn't prison healthcare, it was this very sudden illness, which he fought bravely but succumbed to. Sekou—we were co-defendants—and he was charged with playing a major role in breaking Assata Shakur out of prison. If I can just talk about him. To me he is probably the most outstanding example of steadfastness that I know of. When I say, "steadfastness," I don't mean someone who's rigid or dogmatic and driven that way, but someone who has a deep love for his people and, through, that for all oppressed people. He was part of the famous Panther 21 case in '69, but when the police came to arrest him, he jumped out of a four-story window, and next time he was sighted was in Algeria, and how he got to Algeria was pretty dramatic, too. But even though he was safe in Algeria, he came back to the United States to be underground to continue the struggle of liberation here. He wasn't on Brinks, the case where I was busted, but Brinks led to a collapse of a lot of security networks, and he was arrested soon thereafter at the same time Mtayari Shabaka Sundiata was killed by the police. Sekou walked into the police station in perfect health, came out to three months in the hospital and part of it in intensive care. It wasn't just beatings, there's a difference between beatings and torture, torture is more scientific to break people down. He was tortured, and he didn't break. When we got together, Kuwasi and Sekou and me, you know, in those situation people can recriminate, say. "This fool did this." Sekou wasn't on Brinks. He was jammed up for life because of Brinks. None of that. We're revolutionaries. We know that there are risks. We analyze mistakes, but we don't recriminate against other people. When he came out after 30 some years in prison, he went right to political work. He helped with Jalil [Muntaqim] to form In the Spirit of Mandela, which is a great program to raise consciousness about political prisoners, but also to renew the charge of

genocide, the United States' genocide against New Afrikan people. He's an example.

K'Sisay Sadiki: Can I say something? I want to talk about my father, but I think also of the impact of losing so many of our political prisoners. For me, I have to share that information with my father, which is very hard, because even talking about Baba Sekou Odinga, I recently saw him, he supported my father's campaign, and I saw him back in March and spoke on a panel with him, and I have so many photographs of him. The impact of his health and his relationship with his wife, dequi is like my aunt, you know, so these relationships that I have, our political prisoners like my aunts and uncles, it's hard to be the voice to share that information. When you have to share with someone who was locked up, like my dad, and give him updates. When I had to share with him that Sekou passed away, my father broke down, and I've never heard my father break down before. He was very apologetic about it, but that's a lot, to have to share that information. But thank you for sharing.

David Gilbert: I wanted to add that, in talking about the comrades who passed away, in prison people say the worst thing is, "I don't want to die in prison," which is completely understandable. You want to be among loved ones. But even more important is to have lived our lives with integrity. People like [Albert] Nuh [Washington] and people like Jah [Teddy Heath] and people like Kuwasi [Balagoon] lived their lives with integrity, and there's a legacy there that can be valuable to future generations.

Eric King: I would like to remind our listeners that even though political prisoners, we hold these people up as fighters and warriors, but political prisoners are still humans and still have hearts and still develop strong personal relationships with each other and with others, and when we lose one another it still hurts. It hurts bad, and those holes are hard to mend.

While we have you here, I'd like to have you introduce yourself, K'Sisay, talk about your father for a little bit.

K'Sisay Sadiki: Well, thank you. It's good to see everybody. David, my mother has spoken so much about you, too, my mother, Pamela Hanna, and hi everyone, hi Susan. I just want to say that there was a time when I would talk about my father and I felt alone. I'm his daughter, you know,

so I'm working with them, and it's quite an experience to work with people so young, we're talking folks like 14, 15, 25. Yeah, the things that they say, the things that you hear from them, it's kind of surprising because, it just makes me realize how young I was and how young they are. You think that they would know certain things as a given, but in fact given what they say to you, you realize that that's not so, a lot of work has to be done there. Beyond that, I'm looking towards trying to get involved with videos, such that we will be able to tell our own stories in our own voice. That's something that is a work in progress. It requires a lot of gathering of different pieces to put it together. I'm also writing my autobiography. I should be done with my part of it in another three to four months.

Eric King: I would also like to remind our listeners that, I believe it was, six years ago, today, that Herman was freed from prison, so today is a really wonderful, wonderful anniversary and celebration for that.

Susan, if you have anything going on or if you'd like to talk about any projects you're working on I'd love for you to share, please.

Susan Rosenberg: I guess taking this opportunity just to say that there are all these political prisoner campaigns that are going on, and they're individual, but they're also part of collectivity, they're collective, you know, they're of a piece. What K'Sisay was talking about in regards to her dad. We're talking about Leonard [Peltier] earlier. There's this struggle going on about Mumia. Mumia Abu-Jamal turned 70 this week, and he's still in, and the legal options are closing as time goes on. There's Veronza Bowers. There's all of the people that still are inside. Sometimes I think about, like I've been out longer than I was in, and then I think of people who are still in, who were in when I was in, and it's almost unfathomable to me to feel their suffering from this incredible lengthy amount of time people are doing in horrible, fascistic, totalitarian US prisons. Leave no comrade behind. To the best that we can make that true, that's what a lot of us are still doing, and I think trying to link those cases where there's mass movements, where there can be added support, and a linkage between political prisoners and these other social movements, because we need large numbers of people to free our people. There are people doing that more and more. I'm not right this second working on a specific campaign, but I have been for years and we'll figure that out. I've also been really impacted by this generational shift that's going on that David

is going on across the US is crucial, and all the movements have to take that leadership and learn from it and move forward with it. I feel like that's a whole different discussion but would be great to have, because without it we can't win. I really think it's that clear.

Eric King: Herman, would you please?

Herman Bell: I'll be brief. As both David and Susan have said, I, too, am not as close to the Abolitionist movement, but I am aware of it, I strongly support it, and I see that there has been an uptick in general overall support of it. I have no critique of it. It largely will develop even more support and awareness based on the kind of education that goes out about prison and prison abolition. To me, it's not unlike defunding the police, it's a term that has been misunderstood and used for various purposes and what not, but it's significant. The more people become aware of the need to defund the police, the more people become aware of the abolition of prisons. In terms of education, I think that'll push us much further along until we can actually tear those walls down. It won't happen overnight. It's just something that we should never lose sight of and should always throw our strong support for abolition. In addition to that, the future is for the young people, and we as people who've been out there for a while, we don't and shouldn't take the role of being one who has total knowledge of how to go forward and how to engage the opposing forces. It's the young people, it's their time, and I think that they're doing pretty well in terms of taking up that challenge and going forward.

Eric King: Man, when I was in Greece, I was there for the austerity protests about 14 years ago, and there were anarchist banners everywhere, and they all said "You Can't Fool the Youth," "The Youth Will Carry the Day." That's what you just reminded me of.

We've got a few minutes left. I'd like to ask all of you if you have any projects going on, if you want to talk about them, talk about what you're working on, if there's anything dear to your hearts that you just want to put out there, just give that time and space to let you talk about whatever you've got going on or feel is valuable and would like to say.

Herman Bell: I'm currently part-time employed by The Alliance of Families for Justice, and within that group we have a project called Youth Empowerment, and it's about teaching young people leadership skills, and

I've had this incredible relationship with my father. I've experienced my father in prison when I was a baby. I have letters from him as a baby. I've experienced my father come out of prison. I've experienced that remarkable moment of seeing him come home, and then I've experienced him going back into prison, and having to be a woman and go and experience him going into prison for a second time, and I've had to have my children—he has grandchildren—go through that. I want to say that for me to come on this panel today and actually talk about my father and the International Campaign to Free Kamau Sadiki, that is progress. That's progress, because there was a time when we didn't have a campaign for him, and I have taken this energy, this emotion that I have from my father, and I'm putting it and channeling it into his campaign. We have so much support. My father is in Augusta State Medical Prison, and he's had several wounds, he has sarcoidosis, he has hepatitis, and even with that he's a warrior. We know that.

My father's incredible. He's my hero, but I am always his voice, because, even with this incredible campaign that we have for him, he still doesn't like to talk about what's going on sometimes. I only get to communicate with him through JPay, and when he sends me a message I'm like, "I need to know exactly what's happening, because we have this campaign for you, and we have a legal and medical team committee, we have outreach. We're here to educate people so that they do know who you are." This is what I tell my father. Right now, we're focused on this parole packet. Even to say that, again, my father went back into prison in 2002, and I never thought we could even talk about him coming home. That wasn't something I could even think about before, because it was too much. But now with our campaign, we're focusing on getting these letters out, meeting with council members, just letters from family to bring him home. He's gonna come home. I'm gonna film that, I'm a filmmaker too, it's gonna be an incredible time for me, and I'm channeling that. I know he's going to come home.

What we ask is for support. I always think about the support right now, so that when he does come home—Herman, you know that—you're talking about housing and just the basic needs of a person when they come home with your family and everything. We're pushing for the parole packet and getting these letters out. My father recently, he emailed me, and he said that his sarcoidosis was acting up, that he hasn't experienced that kind of pain in a while. I'm going to see him hopefully soon in May. Again, he has

the legal team in Atlanta to go visit him, which is progress. I have an email, and people can support by going to freekamau.com.

We're making progress. I know what prison is like, not that I've been on the inside, but having someone that I love, I know that it's heavy, and so anytime that I get to see my father is just a remarkable time, even if it's two hours. People take that for granted, if it's two hours it's a special two hours, the letters that we get to write each other, it's special. I also do political work. When I say political work, I'm an artist, but I needed to understand the system, I needed to understand policy, and so the kind of work that I do, even my day work is working with immigration, working in policy. I'm in Harlem, you may hear those horns. I needed to understand what the system is, you know, having those interactions and the strategic plans and what needs to be done to really build a campaign, and, again, using my knowledge, using the connections that I have with everyone, the support, using that, not just feeling like I'm hopeless as his daughter, but feeling like I can really advocate for my father. That's so important for me.

Eric King: I would like to remind our listeners also that political prisoners have families. It's not just us that are inside, it's our families too and they need help too. It's not just supporting prisoners, let's support their families. Also let's support their children, their loved ones, their support teams. Let's raise up our communities instead of just individuals.

We've got one question left and it's a question for the Abolitionist movement. It's what do you see in the Abolitionist movement? What do you see that we're doing well and what needs to be done? There's a lot that needs to be done. We haven't won. So, what would you say to those people fighting to change this world? What message would you say that they're doing well, or what would you say we need to work on?

David Gilbert: First of all, my salute and solidarity to the Abolitionist movement, and thanks for the courage and the fortitude and the persistence to make it a major issue. I like the concept of abolition because it says the whole system is wrong, and I'm not close enough in to sort of make detailed suggestions. Two things from feedback I get—I mean close enough into the day-to-day work—I think people learned this from the Pelican Bay strike, we don't want to be dogmatic against reforms. Reforms mean a lot to prisoners. We want to understand reforms that illustrate that the system is corrupt and wrong and that push forward to more change and to challenge the whole system. I think we have to point out how the society, the people in power, are the real criminals and they're generating the real damage. The last thing, which I know is happening now, is internationalism is always important, especially with Palestine right now.

Eric King: OK, thank you. Susan, if there's anything you'd like to say to the abolitionists out there.

Susan Rosenberg: Yes, that abolition has become a movement with multiple elements and factors and people and forces is a victory also or a success of what was an idea. It had been a movement in the Civil War, but then for a long time was not a word that people used to describe systems or demands. I know that I got out of prison before Angela Davis wrote the book about abolishing prisons. She published that in 2003. I came out of prison being a prison abolitionist, but I think now over the last period that term has correctly or has in fact become a much broader definition than just about prisons, I shouldn't say just, but in terms of prisons. I think that's really important, and I guess I see a link between the fight about prisons and against mass incarceration and around exposing what the state and the power of the state through all of its mechanisms has done and been—it isn't just prisons, it's more than prisons, for sure. It's police, it's policing, we haven't talked about that at all, but I think it's a very important and positive, wonderful thing that it now has a much broader meaning.

Like David, mostly I teach about prisons and do activism in relationship to political prisoners, but I'm not in abolitionist areas of work, so I don't have a critique of the abolitionist movement or things I have to say about what you should or shouldn't be doing. I do think that all movements need to listen to the people that are in them, and that seems really important to me in terms of where the direction is. I agree with David that internationalism really is a key factor.

I guess the one other thing we haven't really talked about or touched on is women and the role of feminism and the role of women's leadership and the role of Black women's leadership and the need to integrate that, and I don't mean integrate from the point of view of integration, but the need to put together and recognize that that leadership of mass movements that